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ABSTRACT

Dealing with the critical years from birth through kindergarten, this micromonograph answers parents' questions about when and how to prepare a child for reading. The pamphlet discusses in depth these suggestions: (1) talking and reading to the child, (2) letting the child read and write, (3) being a model of reading and writing behavior, and (4) encouraging the child's interest in reading and writing. Suggested resources for parents are also included. (HTH)

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How can I prepare my young child for reading?

An IRA Micromonograph by Paula C.Grinnell
The University of Texas at Dallas

As your child's first and most important teacher, you have a right to know more about how children learn to read. When does preparation for reading begin? What can you, as a parent, do to prepare your child for reading? The answers to these questions will affect your child's learning throughout life. So much development takes place before first grade that your child's elementary school teachers can only supplement what you as a parent have already done.

This pamphlet deals with the critical years from birth through kindergarten. Read on to find out how you can help your child become a reader.

When does preparation for reading begin?

Would you be surprised if the answer were "from birth"? As the parent of an infant, this is the best time for you to learn how to assist your child's development. Infants are able to learn more than people used to think. Shortly after birth, infants can turn their heads toward sounds and can look at objects and people. Your infant starts learning immediately, and this learning contributes toward readiness to read.

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What can you do to prepare your child for reading?

Talk to your child

It is essential that you talk to and listen to your child wherever and whenever you can. The more you talk with your child, the more your child will learn and will want to talk to you. This is the first major step toward reading.

Young children usually do not talk in the same way that adults talk. They pronounce words differently, confuse some words (like he, she, her, him), put words in different sentence order, and use verb tenses in an unusual manner. When your child does these things, teach the youngster how to speak by repeating the word, phrase, or sentence in the correct way. Be positive. Saying things such as "That's wrong." or "Can't you say it right?" will discourage your child from trying.

Just as your child develops from wiggling to turning over to crawling to walking to jumping, and so on, your child also develops from babbling to talking. Generally, when children are ready to walk, they walk; and when children are ready to speak like adults, they do.

Both reading and talking are forms of communication. The knowledge of spoken language that children develop forms

the basis for their knowledge of written language. Thus, knowing how to communicate ideas by speaking and listening will help your child learn how to communicate ideas by writing and reading. Here are some suggestions for talking to your infant:

- While feeding your infant, talk about the food as the child eats.
- While dressing your infant, talk about the steps you are taking—"Now I'm going to put on your shirt." "Help me by pushing your hand through the sleeve."
- While bathing your baby, make noises the infant can imitate.
- While riding in the car, talk about the scenery or where you are going. Sing a song or nursery rhyme.

As your child gets older, you will want to talk with and listen to the youngster in more mature ways. Here are some examples of ways in which you can draw your child into conversation:

- While grocery shopping, talk with your child about what foods you're buying, why you're buying them, how much they cost, and when you plan to serve them. Ask what foods your child would like you to buy.
- Before making a meal, discuss what your child likes to eat and how to prepare it.

- Before bedtime, make up a story together. You can start the story, let your child continue it for a sentence or two, and then take your turn again. Be sure to create an ending.
- Before taking a trip, talk with your child about where you're going, what you'll see, what you'll do. If you're going to the zoo, talk about the animals you might see, look them up in the encyclopedia, draw pictures of them. While you're at the zoo talk about the things you see and compare them to what you expected to see. After your trip, talk about what you saw, what you liked, and what you want to see the next time you go to the zoo.

These kinds of activities should be continued through the elementary school. When your child becomes 4, 5, or 6 years old, you can add activities like these:

- Set aside one night a week for family games. Use games that are appropriate for your child, such as "Memory," "Candy Land," or "Chutes and Ladders."
- When taking a car trip, adapt games to meet your child's knowledge and interest levels. Play games like "Twenty Questions," "I Spy," "The Alphabet Game," and "The Number Game."
- When playing "Twenty Questions," one person thinks of something and tells the other players whether it is an

animal, an animal product, a vegetable, a vegetable product, or a mineral. Items such as steak, hamburger patties, mutton stew, potato salad, carrot soup, and guacamole dip are all legitimate because they are products derived from animals or vegetables. Once an item is decided upon, the other players try to guess it by taking turns asking questions that can be answered with "yes," "no," "sometimes," or "I don't know." Initially the players should strive to ask questions that will give them information about the categories into which the item could fit. For example, "Is it bigger than my teddy bear?" "Can you eat it?" "Can it move by itself?" Officially, the game should stop after twenty questions if no one has guessed correctly. If the players agree, however, the game could be extended. The person to decide on the next item can be chosen based on who guessed the correct answer, or everyone can take a turn.

- When playing "I Spy," one person thinks of an object in a car that can be seen by everyone. If the object is a blouse, the person can say, "I spy with my little eye something beginning with B," or "...something yellow," or "...something to wear." Parents can choose to focus on letters, colors, or categories depending on their child. The other players attempt to figure out what the person "spied" by guessing objects in the car, and their guesses are answered with a simple "yes" or "no." When "blouse" is finally guessed, the person who got the correct answer gets the privilege of "spying" the next object.
- When playing "The Alphabet Game," each player tries to find the letters, in sequential order, on signs that can be seen from the car. Begin by looking for an *A*. You may find a "Watch Out for Children" sign. Since there is an *A* in the sign, you now should look for *B*. The license plate in front of you may read "CBZ 693." That would give you two letters, *B* and *C*, so that next you begin looking for *D*. This game can be played as a group effort with younger children, with partners, or in individual competition.
- When playing "The Number Game," follow the same procedures as you did for "The Alphabet Game." Usually the game is over when a player has found all the numbers between 1 and 10 in sequential order.

Read to your child

Read to your child every day, gradually increasing the amount of time until you are reading about 15 minutes a day to your 4 or 5 year old. Even infants enjoy hearing nursery rhymes and listening to their parents name familiar objects in books. Toddlers like books with simply written stories. Slightly older children like all kinds of books: poetry, fairy tales, folktales, humorous, fanciful, and factual stories.

Some families like to have a time for reading just before nap or bedtime. Others prefer more spontaneous reading. Find the method that is best for your family, and read, read, read. Just as children need to hear a lot of spoken language in order to talk, they need to hear a lot of written language in order to read.

Reading to your child helps to build positive attitudes toward reading and exposes your child to a variety of books. You should strive to make the experience so pleasant that you and your child look forward to your special reading times together. As your child gets older, these positive experiences with books will encourage the child to seek out books and other reading materials.

Avoid putting pressure on your child. Do not expect more than the child is capable of giving. Each child develops at a *different* rate and parents should support this pace of growth. If reading experiences become consistently unpleasant, your child will learn to avoid reading in order to get away from the memories of unhappy times associated with reading.

Here are some ways you can help make reading fun as well as an educational experience for your child:

- Know your child's attention span, and don't go beyond it. Some toddlers will sit for hours listening to and looking at books. Others can tolerate only a minute or two of quiet time with books. When toddlers have difficulty sitting still, read to them while they are playing. Play recorded nursery rhymes, stories, and songs at bedtime, at playtime, or while riding in the car. Recite nursery rhymes while rocking your child or simply sitting close by.
- Know your child's interests. Some toddlers are interested in hearing fairy tales or stories. Others only want to hear nursery rhymes or books about familiar subjects. Follow your child's lead in choosing books that are of most interest at the moment.
- Talk about the book before, during, and after reading with the emphasis on discussion, avoiding right or wrong answers. With younger children you will naturally lead the discussion by pointing to and talking about the pictures; exchanging opinions; rewording what occurred in the story; and responding to your child's questions and comments. As your child grows, you can discuss the story through whatever thoughts the story stimulates.
- Ask questions about the story when your child is ready to interact in this way. Be positive by accepting all of your child's thoughts and then discussing other possible solutions. Ask questions that do not require "right"

answers. The purpose of these questions is to get your child to think about the story and to gain a better understanding of the story and the author's message. You could ask questions like: What do you think this story will be about? What do you think will happen next? Did you like the way the story ended? How would you like the story to end?

- Let youngsters read with you when they know a story well enough. At first you might pause so they can supply a word that you're certain they will know. Later, they can repeat refrains with you from well-known stories like *The Gingerbread Man* or *The Three Little Pigs*.

Now that you have some ideas on how to make reading enjoyable, here are some suggestions for fitting reading into a busy schedule:

- When you're nursing or giving your baby a bottle, recite some nursery rhymes.
- When your baby is fussy, try to quiet the child by reading or singing some rhymes.
- When you want a quiet moment together with a child of any age, pick up a book and read.
- Before you go to the doctor or dentist, prepare your child by reading a book that will show what the doctor or dentist does.

- While waiting in checkout lines, doctors' offices, restaurants, train stations, or airports, have a book on hand for reading and discussing.
- Before and/or after watching a television special like "The Wizard of Oz," read the book or a similar story to your child.

Let your child read

Children need your approval in their experiences with reading on their own. When children first "read" books, they may simply practice turning the pages. Later, they may practice "reading" a book from the pictures or reciting a story while turning the pages of a book they have memorized. This is all good practice and these reading behaviors should be supported with comments like "You're reading very nicely," "Will you read a book to me?" or "I like to listen to you read."

As children get older, they may try reading the words in a book. Allow this time together to become fun. This can be accomplished best by not forcing children to struggle through every word. When a child comes to a word that is not known, rather than ask the child to sound out the word, it is better to simply read the word aloud and then allow the child to continue. The purpose of reading is to understand what is being read, and if too much effort is spent on figuring

out how to say each word, the meaning will get lost. The parent's goal is not to teach the child to read; that is the responsibility of the elementary school teacher.

Parents can help most by encouraging in their children a love of and an interest in reading. Here are some ways that you can do this:

- Put brightly colored cloth or cardboard books in your baby's crib or playpen.
- Choose books for gifts so that children can build their own libraries.
- Take your 3, 4, or 5 year old to the library for special programs like storytime.
- Get your 3 year old a library card and take the child to the library regularly. Encourage your child to choose books to bring home and read alone or with you.
- Get books that have cassette tapes or records with them. These are available at the library and are good because your child can spend time alone listening to the story while looking through the book. If you have a cassette and/or record player, your child can listen independently.
- Put books in various places in the house where your child can reach them. Then your child can pick up a book and look through it at any time.
- Order a magazine subscription for your child.

Let your child write

Your child needs lots of opportunities to practice writing. Have many different kinds of materials to write on and to write with, and keep them in a place where your child can reach them. Paper should be in different sizes, colors, kinds, and textures.

Be patient and enjoy watching your child gain competence in writing. At first children just scribble, then they imitate writing by making straight lines and swirls, then they practice making letters and writing messages that possibly only the message writer can read. Gradually, however, everyone will understand the child's writing.

Just as listening and speaking develop together, so do reading and writing. Here are some ideas for giving your child opportunities to write:

- When you make out a shopping list, let your child make out a list, too. A younger child may scribble, and an older one may add items to your list.
- When you write a letter to someone your child knows, let your child write a message as well, either on your paper or on a separate sheet.
- When you write checks, give your child paper to write checks on, also.

- When a friend or relative has a birthday or a holiday, suggest that your child make a card.
- When your own child has a birthday, let an older child help write out the party invitations.
- Buy your 3, 4, or 5 year old an unlined notebook in which the child can write or draw every day.

Be a model

Children need to see their parents reading in a variety of situations, reading different kinds of materials, and reading for different reasons—for pleasure and for specific purposes. Your child should see you reading cookbooks, magazines, newspapers, instructional materials, road signs, maps, and informational books such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and atlases. Your child should see you reading in the home, in the library, and in restaurants. You should tell your child why you are reading these different things, and what kinds of information you are learning from these varied sources.

Your child will have a headstart on reading if you show that you enjoy reading. Here are some suggestions for doing this:

- When your child needs a rest room, read the signs on the doors and help the youngster reach the correct rest room.
- When you look for a parking space, talk about the signs. "I can't park here because that sign says *No Parking*."
- When you are assembling a toy, read aloud from the instructions and allow your child to participate.
- After dinner, have a "family reading time" when everyone reads something together or separately, silently or aloud. Set the rules and the time to fit your family's needs.
- When you read an interesting article or book, tell your child about it.
- When you need some quiet time, tell your child that you want to read. Your youngster can get a book and sit with you or do something else alone for a few minutes while you enjoy your own reading.
- When your child asks a question that you don't have the answer to, say "Let's look it up together." Use a resource book together at home or take a trip to the library.
- While your child is finding a book at the library, look for one that you would like to read yourself, and check it out.

Photos on pages 1 and 2 by George Webber

Encourage your child's interest in reading and writing

Without meaning to, some parents discourage their children from reading and writing by saying such things as, "You're too little for books." "That book is too easy for you." "That's not your name; that's just scribbling." or "You didn't read that book, you just turned the pages." What is meant by reading and writing changes as people grow. Your toddler doesn't walk with the same skill and coordination as does an adult, but we still call what the child does "walking." Thus, when children "read" or "write," they believe they are reading or writing. To tell them otherwise would be the same as saying that they are not walking because they do not walk as you do.

In addition to complimenting your child's attempts at using written language, you can demonstrate your interest in your youngster's activities. Here are some ways in which you can show your interest:

- Keep a bulletin board in the kitchen, family room, bedroom, or wherever it is convenient for your family. Display your child's work on it; periodically read what's written; and comment on a particular piece of work.
- Respond to your child's questions about reading, writing, and spelling.
- Put magnetic letters on the refrigerator and let your child play with them. As your child grows older, use the letters to write words or messages to one another.
- Before giving a child a piece of paper to write on, clearly print the youngster's name in the corner. Eventually, your child will easily recognize the letters and the name.
- When your child draws a picture, ask the youngster to tell you about it. Print what the child says on the paper; read it back so the child can listen; and display the written words on the bulletin board. Don't expect your child to read these words back to you. It is sufficient for your child to learn that one's words can be written down. As children grow, they may have more and more things they want written down. When children are ready, they begin to read some of their own words for themselves.

Above all, show through your own reactions that you value your child and what the child produces. In their own time, children become readers.

Suggested resources for parents

Write to the publishers for these books and magazines

A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading (fifth edition), Nancy Larrick, Bantam Books.

The Beginnings of Writing, Charles A. Temple, Ruth G. Nathan, and Nancy A. Burris, Allyn & Bacon.

Developing Active Readers: Ideas for Parents, Teachers, and Librarians, Dianne L. Monson and DayAnn K. McClenathan (Eds.), International Reading Association.

Helping Children Read: Ideas for Parents, Teachers, and Librarians, Susan Glazer and Carol Brown (Eds.), New Jersey Reading Association. Write: Anne Ferrara, 202 Morningside Drive, Trenton, New Jersey 08618.

The Read-Aloud Handbook, Jim Trelease, Penguin Books.

The Reading Triangle: Parents Can Help Children Succeed in Reading, Linda M. Clinard, Focus Publishing Company. Write: The Reading Triangle, P.O. Box 2862, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48018.

The World's Best Indoor Games, Gyles Brandreth, Pantheon Books.

Cricket Magazine. Write: Open Court Publishing Company, 1058 Eighth Street, LaSalle, Illinois 61301.

The Electric Company Magazine. Write: 200 Watt Street, P.O. Box 2923, Boulder, Colorado 80321.

Ranger Rick. Write: National Wildlife Federation, 8925 Leesburg Pike, Vienna, Virginia 22180.

Sesame Street Magazine. Write: P.O. Box 2895, Boulder, Colorado 80321.

World. Write: National Geographic Society, 17th and M Streets N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Send stamped, self-addressed envelopes to obtain free copies of these items

Booklists of recommended books for children. Write: American Library Association, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611.

"How to Help Your Child Become a Better Writer." Write: National Council of Teachers of English, Order Department, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

Parent Brochures entitled "You Can Encourage Your Child to Read," "Good Books Make Reading Fun for Your Child," and "Your Home is Your Child's First School." Write: International Reading Association, P.O. Box 8139, Newark, Delaware 19714.

titles available in the MICROMONOGRAPH SERIES

These booklets for parents can be purchased for $ 35 each to IRA members and $ 50 each to others (prepaid) by writing to the International Reading Association, P.O. Box 8139, Newark, Delaware 19714.

How Can I Help My Child Build Positive Attitudes toward Reading? Susan Mandel Glazer. Offers practical suggestions for parents to help stimulate reading interests in their children at all ages. 1980, 12 pp.

What is Reading Readiness? Norma Rogers. Identifies for parents the general stage of developmental maturity and preparedness at which a child can learn to read proficiently. 1971, 16 pp.

How Can I Help My Child Get Ready to Read? Norma Rogers. Urges parents to take advantage of routine home experience to develop skills that will help children get ready to read. 1972, 24 pp.

How Can I Encourage My Primary Grade Child to Read? Molly Kayes Ransbury. Helps parents understand and develop a child's reading interest. 1972, 12 pp.

How Can I Get My Teenager to Read? Rosemary Winebrenner. Offers parents tips for stimulating teenagers to read. 1971, 12pp.

Why Read Aloud to Children? Julie M.T. Chan. Offers suggestions to parents as to how to set an example for their children, provide a home environment conducive to reading, and use reading related activities to stimulate a desire to learn to read. 1974, 12 pp.

How Does My Child's Vision Affect His Reading? Donald W. Eberly. Stresses parent awareness of child's vision and need for correction when problems exist. 1972, 12 pp.

How Can I Help My Child Learn to Read English as a Second Language? Marcia Baghban. Suggests ways parents can help bilingual children build language skills. 1972, 16 pp.

Cómo ayudar a su niño a aprender a leer inglés como segunda lengua Traducción es español de **How Can I Help My Child Learn to Read English as a Second Language?** Traducido por Ricardo L. García y Rita Maxine Deyoe. Esta publicacion ofrece sugerencias prácticas a los padres hispano-hablantes sobre como animar a sus hijos a leer inglés. 1975, 16 págs.

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The International Reading Association attempts, through its publications, to provide a forum for a wide spectrum of opinion on reading. This policy permits divergent viewpoints without assuming the endorsement of the Association. This booklet was prepared for the International Reading Association as a continuation of the micromonographs series which was orginated by the Clearinghouse on Reading (Eric/Crier) at Indiana University under the direction of James L. Laffey, Bruce J. Tone, and Billie Strunk.

Micromonograph Series *continued*

What Books and Records Should I Get for My Preschooler? Norma Rogers. Lists books and records which appeal to children's interests, meet their needs, and suit their maturity levels. 1972, 20 pp.

How Can I Prepare My Young Child for Reading? Paula C. Grinnell. Offers suggestions for helping in the critical years from birth through kindergarten. 1984, 12 pp.

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